

**Subcommittee Chair Joe Neguse
NPFPL Legislative Hearing
Opening Statement
June 8, 2021**

- **Thank you all for attending this Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands' legislative hearing on four bills to improve access to recreational opportunities on our national forests and public lands.**
- **I would also like to thank our administration and outside witnesses for joining us virtually today to share their perspectives on these bills.**
- **Before I address these bills, I'd like to talk about why public lands recreation is so important to me and my constituents in Colorado's 2nd Congressional District.**
- **In Colorado, the U.S. Department of Commerce estimates 149,000 jobs in outdoor recreation totaling \$6.4 billion in wages and salaries.**
- **The Outdoor Industry Association estimates outdoor recreation contributes as much as \$28 billion in annual consumer spending in Colorado, and \$887 billion nationally.**
- **In my district, there are an estimated 500 outdoor companies and with places like Rocky Mountain**

National Park, Arapahoe Basin Ski Area, and countless other world class recreational opportunities right outside our doors, it shouldn't be a surprise that my constituents alone spend \$2.5 billion on outdoor recreation annually.

- **Safe it to say that outdoor recreation is as much about our economy as it is about the lifestyle and opportunities that draw so many people to my district and the State.**
- **It is for these reasons that one of the first bills I introduced in Congress was the Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy Act or the CORE Act.**
- **I've worked with Chair Grijalva and others to now pass this proposal through the House on numerous occasions, including most recently this year as a Title of the Protecting America's Wilderness and Public Lands Act.**
- **The CORE Act would designate nearly 400,000 acres throughout Colorado for a variety of primarily recreational purposes.**
- **It is important to remember that Congressional designations are one of the best tools we have to provide for recreation focused management,**

promote sustainable visitation, and increase economic activity in the gateway communities where many outdoor businesses are based.

- **While the CORE Act is focused on Colorado's communities, there are further policy changes that can help us improve public lands recreation nationally.**
- **Last Congress, I was proud to work with this Subcommittee's former Chair, then-Rep. Haaland, and other bipartisan members of Congress to introduce the Simplifying Outdoor Access for Recreation Act, more commonly known as the SOAR Act.**
- **This Congress, we are picking up where that work left off having reintroduced the SOAR Act as H.R. 3670 to reflect last year's Committee reported version with small technical changes and improvements.**
- **As introduced, the SOAR Act would seek to improve public lands recreation in three main ways: modernizing recreation permitting; making recreation a priority; and maintaining recreational assets in partnership with private volunteers and non-profit organizations, including public lands corps.**

- **More simply put, the SOAR Act is about making sure outdoor recreation is growing our multi-billion-dollar recreation economy, while providing our communities with the physical and mental benefits of time outside.**
- **These efforts are especially important as we continue our economic recovery and to build back better from this pandemic.**
- **In support of those same goals, I'm pleased to be hearing three additional recreation focused bills today, all of which I'm a cosponsor.**
- **H.R. 3686, the Ski Hill Resources for Economic Development Act or SHREAD Act, introduced by Rep. Annie Kuster of New Hampshire, and which I am proud to cosponsor, would create the Ski Fee Area Retention Account.**
- **This bill would help retain and spend a percentage of ski area rental fees to support ski areas, other recreation, and wildfire preparedness on the national forests where those fees are collected.**

- **As a result of the pandemic many parks, ski areas and outfitters were forced to close or limit capacity.**
- **However, people continued to flock to our national forests and public lands, increasing visitation, but reducing forest revenues and receipts.**
- **Going forward, the SHRED Act will help ensure that our highest visitation forests are equipped with additional resources to support their unique needs and responsible management.**
- **Next, we have H.R. _____, the Environmental Justice in Recreation Permitting Act introduced by Subcommittee Member Rep. Tlaib from Michigan.**
- **A product of this Subcommittee's past work on recreation policy, this legislation was first introduced last Congress by then-Chair Haaland, and this year a similar version has already passed the House as an amendment to H.R. 803 (Protecting America's Wilderness and Public Lands Act).**
- **This legislation would provide important tools to the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture**

allowing them to report to Congress, and identify additional opportunities, to improve access for more diverse user groups, including low-income families and those who may be at higher risk of adverse health or environmental effects.

- **Lastly, from Subcommittee Member Rep. Moore of Utah, we have H.R. 3527, Modernizing Access to Our Public Land Act or MAPLand Act.**
- **This bill would ensure recreationist have up-to-date digital information about public lands and improve the availability of information about access points, trails and seasonal restrictions or closures.**
- **All the bills before us today warrant bipartisan support and I look forward to engaging with my colleagues and the diverse coalitions of stakeholders in support of these bills as we work to sustain and expand public lands recreation and support our local economies.**
- **Before I yield, I think it is important we take a moment to recognize how climate change is impacting our ability to recreate on public lands.**

- **In past Committee meetings, witnesses have testified to more seasonal uncertainty, reduced snowpack, uncharacteristic fish and wildlife migrations, and extreme drought and wildfire – all affecting their ongoing ability to hunt, fish, recreate and make a living at outdoor dependent businesses.**
- **The SOAR Act helps to recognize climate change impacts by providing more flexibility to permit holders who are increasingly unable to utilize their permitted days or activities due to circumstances beyond their control.**
- **The bill also recognizes shifting seasons, and with them changing visitation patterns, by considering opportunities to expand seasonal recreation, staffing, and resources.**
- **Addressing these climate-driven concerns helps support small businesses and ensures that our land management agencies remain nimble in the face of climate uncertainty.**
- **To our witnesses, I just wanted to again thank you for being here today and reassure you of how valuable your testimony is to our efforts.**

- **I'd now like to yield back and would recognize the Subcommittee Ranking Member Rep. Fulcher for his 5 minutes.**